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Baseball Takes Root in Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska

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Recommended citation:

Eberle, Mark E. 2020. *Baseball Takes Root in Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska*. Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas. 20 pages.

Baseball Takes Root in Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska

Mark E. Eberle

The Kansas and Nebraska Territories were established in 1854, each encompassing more area than the current states. The Kansas Territory extended west to the continental divide, including much of what would become the eastern portion of the Colorado Territory in 1861. The Nebraska Territory initially extended across much of the current states of Montana and Wyoming, as well as the western portions of North and South Dakota and part of Colorado. Statehood came for Kansas in January 1861, as southern states seceded from the Union. Nebraska became a state after the US Civil War in March 1867. Colorado was granted statehood during the nation's centennial year in August 1876. Residents of all three territories enjoyed playing and watching baseball.

The spread of baseball around the country beyond the Northeast is sometimes associated with soldiers returning home who learned the game during the Civil War. In the West, soldiers on active duty sometimes brought the sport with them as they served on the frontier. For example, in February 1864, members of the California Volunteers and Nevada Volunteers stationed in the Utah Territory at Camp Douglas (now within Salt Lake City) played baseball on George Washington's birthday. In April, they organized the Union Base Ball Club (BBC). These are the first known instances of baseball played in Utah. The soldiers also played baseball at Fort Bridger in southwestern Wyoming at least as early as 1867. Prior to this, local residents had organized cricket clubs in 1862 and 1863.¹ Immediately after the Civil War, soldiers at Fort Laramie played the first documented baseball games in Wyoming during the winter of 1865–1866. “Besides the theatre, the officers and men have a New York base ball club, and many an exciting match of this truly American game has been played this winter on our parade ground.”²

The association of soldiers with the arrival of baseball is partly true in Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado. For example, troopers in the Seventh US Cavalry, who served in Kansas and adjacent regions during the wars with Plains Indians in the late 1860s, contributed to the spread of baseball. However, white settlers from the Northeast and Midwest also brought baseball and similar ball games to the region before the Civil War began, and civilians played ball throughout the war.³ This monograph explores these and other aspects of baseball as it took root in Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska.*

* For additional context, the first known ball game in Montana was in 1866. The Rocky Mountain BBC in Virginia City played an intramural game. On game day, “the wind blew a hurricane,” so the determined players “were compelled to leave their chosen ground and take refuge in a hollow, not so well fitted for the sport, near the new burying-ground; and even then the wind was most annoying.” The first nine defeated the second nine, 121–88 (*Montana Post*, 26 May 1866, p 3; 2 June 1866, p 3). The earliest clubs in North and South Dakota were organized during the 1870s (Bohn 2016). The first documented game between two clubs in New Mexico was in 1868 (Eberle 2020b).

Informal Beginnings

During the early years, the term “ball” in territorial newspapers typically referred to a firearm projectile, a dance, or a metaphorical sphere in motion representing a desired action. The first known reference to ball games in the region was published in March 1858 as part of a city ordinance in Tecumseh, Kansas (near Topeka). The ordinance dealt with behavior and activities prohibited on city streets and other public spaces.

Ordinance No. 4. Sec. 11. No person shall make any brawls or tumults, or, in any street, lane, or alley, or other public place, be guilty of any rude, indecent or disorderly conduct, or shall insult or wantonly impede any person passing thereon, or shall throw any stones, bricks, snow balls or dirt, or play at ball or at any game at which a ball is used.⁴

It is possible young boys were the target of the portion of the ordinance that prohibited ball games in streets and public places, where it interfered with other activities. However, they were not alone in playing ball. The earliest description of ball games played in Kansas on 25 December 1858 was published in Emporia on 1 January 1859 by the *Kansas News* (renamed the *Emporia News* later that year). On that Christmas day, ball games took center stage among the various activities.

The observance of Christmas day in Emporia was not unlike that generally practiced elsewhere. The weather was mild, but the sky was overcast with clouds. In the morning, afternoon and evening interesting religious services were held at the house of Mr. S. G. Brown, which were well attended. Turkeys and such like “fixings,” supposed to be peculiarly appropriate to the celebration of Christmas day, suffered extensively about dinner time. The senior editor was invited out “to dine,” the junior ruralized amongst his friends in the country, where he feasted on the “fat of the land,” and the compositors went hunting with double-barreled guns, and didn’t kill anything. The merchants kept “shop” all day, doing a good trade, and the emancipated school boys amused themselves with shooting their crackers and torpedos [*sic*], and burning powder promiscuously. But *the* feature of the observance was a huge game of “ball” in the public square. Nearly all the male bipeds of the place—old and young—participated in the sport, which commenced in the morning and continued until dark.—The fun and excitement were great, and doffing, for the time, the gravity and dignity of every-day life and business, all were “boys again,” and entered into the spirit of the game with relish and vigor that would have done credit to their younger years.—The discussions which grew out of this revival of “the days when we were young,” have been very numerous, covering the whole range of “ball science,” and many are the learned disquisitions we have listened to in regard to the merits and demerits of “base ball,” bull-pen, cat-ball, etc., with the proper mode of conducting the game.—Nobody got mad or drunk during the whole day; and although the time *might* have been more profitably spent, yet taking it all in all, we believe that it was much better employed than is usual on such occasions.⁵

As suggested by this report, early ball games were played whenever the weather permitted, not just summertime. Games were again reported in Emporia during November 1859. On this occasion, the “big boys” made the “small boys” take the field and never allowed them to get a turn at bat. Then one day, a “couple of men” joined the team of small boys and “soon reversed the order of things, compelling the big boys to perform the task which they had before forced upon the little ones, and the result was that they soon got sick of the sport and quit the game.”⁶

The next mention of ball games was in January 1860. The *Topeka Tribune* reported, “Those who are shivering over their fires in their northern and eastern homes, would be surprised to see our young men with their coats off, indulging in the pleasant recreation derived from a game of ball. It is no unusual occurrence here, even now, in the dead of winter.”⁷ The vague term “game of ball” probably referred to baseball or a similar sport. The first confirmed reference to a football game in Kansas was in 1865. It was actually an early version of rugby or soccer played that day by Irish immigrants in Atchison. Additional reports of “football” in Kansas were not published until the 1870s.⁸

In these early reports, ball-and-stick games were usually referred to simply as “ball.” As noted in the story of Christmas Day in Emporia, several types of ball games were played at the time. In May and June 1860, the *White Cloud Kansas Chief* and other Kansas newspapers published a story purporting to describe how Abraham Lincoln learned that he had been nominated as the Republican candidate for President of the United States. It involved a game referred to as “town ball.”⁹

Given that the earliest descriptions of ball games were vague, it is uncertain if some referred to base ball (the New York game), town ball (the Philadelphia game), round ball (the Massachusetts game), or a local variation of these sports.¹⁰ Cricket was also played, but reports of those contests typically used that name rather than the generic “ball.”¹¹

In addition to ball games brought west by white settlers, there was a ball-and-stick game played by American Indians—lacrosse, sometimes referred to as Indian baseball.¹² One such game was played in April 1862 in LeRoy, Kansas. At the time, LeRoy was “the abode of a large number of Indians who [had] been driven from their homes [in the Indian Territory (Oklahoma)] by their sesesh brethren.”¹³ Some of these players probably joined Indian regiments organized at LeRoy in May 1862 to fight for the Union.*

HOW ABE LINCOLN RECEIVED THE NOMINATION.—When the news of Lincoln's nomination reached Springfield, his friends were greatly excited and hastened to inform “Old Abe” of it. He could not be found at his office or at home, but after some minutes the messenger discovered him out in a field with a parcel of boys having a pleasant game of town ball. All his comrades immediately threw up their hats and commenced to hurrah. Abe grinned considerably, scratched his head and said, “Go on boys; don't let such nonsense spoil a good game.” The boys did go on with their bawling, but not with the game of ball. They got out an old rusty cannon and made it ring, while the tall Sucker went home.

* The Civil War reopened rifts within the Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, and other American Indian nations living in the Indian Territory. A large number of people who chose not to side with the Confederacy fled north with Muscogee leader Opothle Yahola to Kansas under horrific conditions during the winter of 1861–1862, pursued and attacked by Confederate troops (Warde 2013).

Last Sunday I witnessed a very novel sight, and me unaccustomed to such scenes, the whole affair was very interesting. ... It was an Indian game at ball, and took place on the green near one of the hotels. In the first place, two frames, each about twelve feet in height and four feet wide, were stationed about 500 feet apart.—There were, of course, two parties in play, each one possessing a frame. The peculiarity of the games was, to throw a ball through the frame or hit it. When one party succeeded in throwing a ball through the other's frame, or hitting it, the feat counted one. Twenty was the number played for. ... [A ball] was thrown upwards from the center by the umpires. The two parties when scrambling for the ball, presented a "mixed up mess," the like of which, I never saw before in my whole life. Each Indian carried a sort of spoon scoop, about two feet in length, with which to catch and throw the ball. It was contrary to the rules of the game to touch the ball with the hands. ... Nearly an hour would sometimes take place, before either party could hit the frame of the other.¹⁴

Most early ball games were played by picked teams. However, in March 1861, the *State Journal* in Lawrence, Kansas encouraged the organization of baseball teams. "Base ball is the favorite amusement of our young men now. It is a noble exercise, and we sincerely wish the boys would organize two good clubs, practice well for a month, and then have a match game before the citizens of the city. ... Who leads in this matter?" Two weeks later, the newspaper wondered, "How about that match game of base ball?" The effort was unsuccessful, but the sport persisted in Lawrence on an informal basis, as reported in April 1863. On "fast day"—a day of fasting and prayer observed primarily in New England*—a "match game of base ball will be made up at the Eldridge House." Four months later, on August 21, William Quantrill and about 450 Confederate guerillas attacked the sleeping town in what has become known as the Lawrence Massacre. About 150 men and boys in the city were murdered. Most of the businesses were burned, including the four-story Eldridge House.¹⁵

While baseball was played informally in eastern Kansas, the first baseball club in the region was organized in Colorado.¹⁶ Following gold discoveries along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in the late 1850s, Denver and other towns were established in the western portion of the Kansas Territory. Denver City was named after Kansas Territorial Governor James W. Denver. A year after the Colorado Territory was established in 1861, Denver had its first baseball team. As with the *State Journal* in Lawrence, the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver published a call for the organization of such a club in March 1862.

Who will be the first, then, to inaugurate a shove for forming a base ball club? It is a beautiful game as played according to the modern rules, and many hold that it is infinitely superior to cricket. In fact, it is rapidly becoming the National game of America, as cricket is of the mother country. ... Let us have a base ball club, by all means.¹⁷

* The New England Emigrant Aid Company founded Lawrence in 1854 (Miner 2002, pages 37–38).

The club was organized later that month and initially included 28 members. The Denver BBC would “play according to the rules of the modern, or New York game,” though only “two or three persons” had experience with those rules. In April, the *New York Clipper* published a notice of the club’s organization. “Base Ball Among the Rocky Mountain Boys. Who says that this popular game is not progressive, when we hear of the organization of a base ball club away off in Denver, Colorado Territory, numbering more than thirty members. Such is the fact, and we state it with pleasure.” It was at this time that a Denver merchant began selling *Beadle’s Dime Base-Ball Player*, edited by Henry Chadwick, which included the rules adopted at the annual conventions of the National Association of Base-Ball Players. With only one club, members were limited to intramural games, but the *Rocky Mountain News* published a pair of box scores for games played on April 26. Below the box scores was an explanation of abbreviations used “for the benefit of those not posted on the contractions pertaining to a description of the game.” The *New York Clipper* later reprinted the box scores, minus the glossary. However, few additional reports of baseball were published.¹⁸ In late June, the *Rocky Mountain News* explained the demise of the club.

FIRST GAME.	
H. L. RUNS	H. L. RUNS
Hull, r. f. 3.....3	McNeil, 1st b. 3.....0
Willoughby, p. 3.....3	Rounds, c. 3.....2
Bartlett, c. 3.....3	Pickard, p. 3.....0
Keith, 1st b. 3.....3	Pierce, s. s. 3.....0
McClellan, 2d b. 6.....0	Raff, r. f. 3.....0
Prouty, c. f. 2.....2	Harrington, 2d b. 3.....0
C. Porter, 3d b. 2.....2	Howard, 3d b. 2.....2
H. Porter, l. f. 3.....2	W. Porter, l. f. 2.....1
Yates, s. s. 2.....2	Ryan, c. f. 3.....1
Total, 27 20	Total, 27 7
Umpire, Mr. Ashley.	Scorer, G. P. Slade.
SECOND GAME.	
H. L. RUNS	H. L. RUNS
Hull, r. f. 2.....1	Mc Neil, p. 3.....0
Willoughby, p. 4.....0	Rounds, c. 3.....3
Bartlett, c. 3.....0	Pickard, 1st b. 3.....1
Keith, 1st b. 3.....0	Pierce, s. s. 3.....1
Yates, s. s. 3.....0	Raff, 3d b. 2.....2
McClellan, 2d b. 3.....2	Harrington, 2d b. 2.....1
Prouty, 3d b. 1.....2	Howard, r. f. 3.....0
C. Porter, l. f. 2.....2	W. Porter, l. f. 3.....0
H. Porter, c. f. 2.....2	Ryan, c. f. 2.....0
Total, 27 9	Total, 27 8
Umpire, B. B. Stiles.	Scorer, C. P. Slade.
<p>NOTE.—For the benefit of those who are not posted on the contractions pertaining to a description of the game, we give them, as follows: H. L., hands lost, or put out; RUNS, tallies; c., catcher; p., pitcher; L. F., left fielder; C. F., center fielder; R. F., right fielder; s. s., short stop. The basemen are designated 1st b., 2d b., and 3d b.</p>	

For some time our club prospered well, and enjoyed some excellent games, though to tell the truth, there was a lack of method and order generally observable; but as soon as the mining season fairly opened, a good share of the members went to the mountains to work, and the club gradually discontinued playing. To be sure, there are plenty of young men left in town to form an excellent club, but the weather has been so warm, and “the air so light,” that they find it difficult to shake off the enervating effects (polite name for laziness,) and consequently the base ball club is tabled for the summer. It will probably revive again this fall, and play more or less during the winter, as the weather during that season of the year here is excellent for out-door sports.¹⁹

It did not happen. The next mention of baseball in Denver was a call in April 1864 to “Let the Base Ball Club be revived!” This was followed in May by, “What’s the matter with the Base Ball Club?”²⁰ Organized baseball clubs would not return to Colorado until after the Civil War had ended.

As in Utah, military units from Kansas played ball during the war. In September 1862, the Eleventh Kansas Volunteer Infantry was being organized. The new recruits were encamped at Camp Lyon near Fort Leavenworth, waiting to be mustered into service. "Tents were being pitched for new comers, and the men were carrying on their amusements pretty much the same as on any other days. As we have not yet been mustered into service, the boys have had little to do, but spend time in singing, playing ball and sleeping." In April 1863, after fighting briefly as infantry, the regiment was mounted as the Eleventh Kansas Volunteer Cavalry. One of the colonels in the unit was Scottish immigrant Thomas Moonlight, who played for the Leavenworth Occidental Cricket Club in 1863 and was a member of the city's Frontier BBC organized immediately after the war.²¹

Baseball continued among Kansas regiments as they served during the war. In the spring of 1863, the Eighth Kansas Volunteer Infantry, mustered in August 1861, was encamped at Nashville, Tennessee. The regiment had recently fought in the Battle of Perryville and would soon participate in the battles of Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, Franklin, and Nashville, as well as the siege of Atlanta.²² That spring, however, they enjoyed a respite that stood in sharp contrast to the horrors of war.

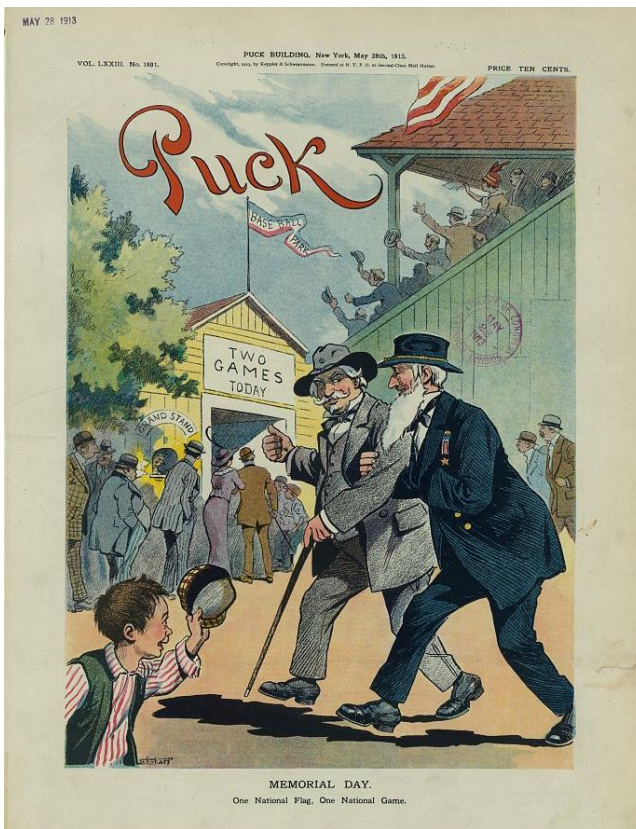
There is a report that we leave in a short time for the front, but it does not look like it in camp. A neighbouring brick yard has furnished us sufficient bricks to raise walls to our tents three feet high, which makes our Sibley's very roomy and comfortable, and during the past few days we have been drawing cedar trees from the bluffs and planting them along the lines of our tents. The shade they give is very pleasant, and the contrast between the white tents and evergreen trees is very fine. The men enjoy themselves well, and it looks more like a college play ground than an encampment in the rebel country, to see our officers and privates playing ball together.²³

After the Civil War ended in 1865, baseball clubs in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and other territories along the Rocky Mountains and on the Great Plains became increasingly numerous. The view that baseball spread to various parts of the country because returning veterans had been introduced to the sport while serving in the eastern theaters with units from the Northeast is sometimes casually reduced to a single sentence that overstates its importance. Standing alone, it suggests that people on the frontier were unfamiliar with the sport before the war. Yet, men were playing baseball prior to 1865 in Colorado and Kansas. In California, baseball clubs were widespread before the war. In 1860, the Eagle BBC of San Francisco defeated the Sacramento BBC at the State Fair to claim a silver baseball trophy.²⁴ Settlers moving west from the Northeast and Midwest transplanted their interest in baseball before, during, and after the war.²⁵

Thus, the association of veterans with the spread of baseball is only one factor that contributed to its increased popularity following the Civil War. A thorough exploration of the subject is beyond the scope of this narrative, but two likely factors have relevance here with regard to the role of former soldiers. First, men serving in the army during the war likely had more opportunities to play baseball than they did while working as farmers and miners, for example, on the western frontier. Second, baseball was associated with the

innocence of youth and stood in sharp contrast to the brutal horrors of war. Recall the reporter's observation of the ball games in Emporia in 1858, a time and place of violent tensions referred to as Bleeding Kansas. "The fun and excitement were great, and doffing, for the time, the gravity and dignity of every-day life and business, all were 'boys again,' and entered into the spirit of the game with relish and vigor that would have done credit to their younger years."²⁶

Perhaps the increased opportunity to play baseball while serving in the army and the enhanced enjoyment soldiers shared with comrades through a welcome diversion from brutal combat contributed to their attachment to baseball and their desire to continue playing in their hometowns. After the war, many new towns were established in Kansas and elsewhere on the frontier, where interest in the sport was bolstered by other factors, such as community pride.²⁷ In a nation that needed to be reunited, these factors would conceivably add to the appeal of a community activity that had been promoted as the *national* pastime since before the Civil War,²⁸ as illustrated on the cover of *Puck* magazine.



Memorial Day. One National Flag, One National Game.

Samuel D. Ehrhart. *Puck*, 28 May 1913.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011649595/>

Kansas Base Ball Clubs

For multiple reasons, the popularity of baseball did spread after the Civil War (Table 1). Business owners and other professionals who could take time from work to practice and play afternoon games, not the farmers and miners, initially organized baseball clubs. The first club in Kansas was the Frontier BBC of Leavenworth, which joined the National Association of Base-Ball Players in December 1865. The following year, a club from the city of Fort Scott, probably the Lincoln BBC, joined the NABBP. Independent clubs in the eastern part of the state were also organized, and intercity competition began in 1866. Four teams participated that year—the Frontier BBC, the Wyandott BBC (present-day Kansas City, Kansas), and the Antelope BBC and Hope BBC from Kansas City Missouri. The Frontiers and Antelopes were the best of the four, each winning a game on their opponent's grounds in a home-and-home series.²⁹

Intercity competition in Kansas increased substantially in 1867. Most teams began by playing intramural games or games with other teams from the same town. Towns with more than one club had a top team. For example, the Frontier BBC won every game with the Quartermaster Department (Q.M.D.) BBC from Fort Leavenworth. The Kaw Valley BBC topped the University BBC Club in Lawrence. In Kansas City, there were three teams on the Kansas side. The Anderson BBC, composed of railroad employees, defeated the Wyandotte City Cricket Club, who easily beat the Wyandott BBC.³⁰

In addition to local contests, 13 of the 22 clubs organized in Kansas during 1867 played opponents outside their city (Table 1). The most active team was the Shawnee BBC of Topeka, which compiled a record of 3–2 against the Kaw Valley BBC and University BBC from Lawrence and the Awkward BBC from Manhattan. The Kaw Valley BBC was 4–0, with two close wins over the Frontier BBC and victories against the Shawnee BBC and Q.M.D. BBC. The Frontiers (in one game) and the Q.M.D. were only able to field eight players in losses to the Kaw Valleys. In addition to games between adult teams, Topeka's Capitol BBC and the Young America BBC from Lawrence were both composed of players 10–14 years old. They split a pair of games.³¹

With all of this competition, a baseball tournament was proposed for the State Fair in Lawrence. The prize was a silver baseball. In the end, only two or three games were played in which the silver ball was on the line. On the first day of competition at the fair on September 26, the Shawnee BBC was scheduled to play the Kaw Valley BBC, but no reports



Silver baseball trophy and case for the Kansas champion in 1867. Kansas Historical Society (kansasmemory.org). Used with permission. Copy and reuse restrictions apply.

of the game were published. If the game was played, the Kaw Valleys apparently won, because they defeated the University BBC the following day and were awarded the trophy. The Frontier BBC had lost two games to the Kaw Valley BBC in August and did not attend the fair. After the fair, the Q.M.D. BBC challenged the Kaw Valleys to a game for the silver ball, which was played on November 7. The Kaw Valley BBC retained the trophy with a 36–23 victory over the Q.M.D., who mustered only eight players.³²

Leavenworth and Lawrence dominated Kansas baseball during the late 1860s. In addition to the white clubs, black baseball teams from these cities played the first intercity games between black town teams in the region in 1868. This brief era of gentlemen’s baseball clubs in Kansas and the subsequent participation of players from a broader cross-section of the community on amateur, semipro, and professional teams have been described in detail elsewhere.³³

Table 1.—Kansas base ball clubs (BBC) organized in 1865–1867. Clubs marked with an asterisk (*) participated in intercity games.

Year	City	Team
1865	Leavenworth	Frontier BBC
1866	Fort Scott	Lincoln BBC
	Leavenworth	Frontier BBC*
	Leavenworth	Pioneer BBC (Leavenworth BBC)
	Manhattan	Blue Mont BBC
	Manhattan	College BBC
	Wyandotte City (Kansas City)	Wyandott BBC*
1867	Atchison	Atchison BBC (Ad Astra BBC)*
	Baldwin City	Mutual BBC*
	Ellsworth	Smoky Hill BBC*
	Fort Harker (Kanopolis)	Bradley BBC*
	Fort Leavenworth (Leavenworth)	Quartermaster Department (Q.M.D.) BBC*
	Fort Scott	Central BBC
	Fort Scott	Lincoln BBC
	Junction City	Junction City BBC
	Lawrence	Kaw Valley BBC*
	Lawrence	University BBC*
	Lawrence	Young America BBC (Star BBC)*
	Leavenworth	Frontier BBC*
	Manhattan	Awkward BBC*
	Manhattan	College BBC
	Olathe	Prairie BBC
	Ottawa	Ottawa BBC (Franklin BBC)*
	Topeka	Capitol BBC*
	Topeka	Prairie BBC (Old Maids)
	Topeka	Shawnee BBC*
	Wyandotte City (Kansas City)	Anderson BBC
	Wyandotte City (Kansas City)	Wyandott BBC
	Wyandotte City (Kansas City)	Wyandotte City Cricket Club

Nebraska Base Ball Clubs

Baseball teams also began to organize in eastern Nebraska following the war. Primary sources for Nebraska are not as readily available as for Kansas, but ball clubs were organized by at least 1866. However, as in Kansas, the first known mention of baseball was not about a club. In June 1866, as the Nebraska Territory sought admission as a state, baseball was mentioned in regard to alleged irregularities in vote counting.

Plattsmouth, N.T., June 11th, 1866. James M. Woolworth, Esq. Dear Sir: One little circumstance in the way of politics that interests us all. I would beg leave to claim your interest. On return of the official vote[,] the county canvassers found that the whole Democratic ticket was elected, and you know something had to be [done]. They looked over the Democratic precincts and Rock Bluffs, the second in number of votes and largely Democratic, they cast out[,] and for cause they assign no fraud, no ballot-box stuffing, no illegal voting, but the slight informality that the judges adjourned for dinner and took the ballot-box with them. ... The judges at Mt. Pleasant precinct, with the clerk, all went out and engaged in a game of ball during the voting hours, but they gave 36 Republican majority. ... Excuse this letter, and permit me to remain your Democratic friend.³⁴

In August 1866, the Omaha BBC traveled about 15 miles north to play the Fort Calhoun BBC in the first intercity baseball game documented for Nebraska so far. In November, an intramural game was also played in Omaha, and other intramural games were likely played elsewhere in Nebraska. The Omaha BBC and Fort Calhoun BBC played each other again in 1867, but other teams, including the Brownville BBC, began to join them.³⁵

Nebraska City, about 40 miles south of Omaha, became a hotbed of baseball activity. The town team was named the Otoe BBC. After playing intramural matches, the club was reorganized in August 1868, with the intention of playing the Pottawattomie BBC of Council Bluffs, Iowa, directly across the Missouri River from Omaha. "The books are now open and a few more members are wanted in the club. It only costs one dollar to enter the ranks." After practice games in which the second nine was given six outs per inning, the Otoe BBC rode the train north to Council Bluffs on the morning of September 4. After the Otoes ate lunch, the teams began their game. About 200 spectators looked on as the Pottawattomie BBC defeated their guests, 33–16. The box score published in local newspapers also appeared in the *New York Clipper*. A return game in Nebraska City was played during the State Fair in October. "Several hundred spectators, Ladies and Gentlemen," saw the Otoe BBC, wearing new uniforms, redeem itself, 39–25. "As the Otoes were defeated by the same club at Council Bluffs not long since, the Council Bluffs men did not hesitate to to put up their money on them freely[;] the consequence was considerable money changed hands at the end of the game."³⁶

That same week at the fairgrounds, the Otoes defeated a team known as the Gasmann BBC, 50–30, and claimed a "handsome belt" valued at \$8 (according to a local newspaper) or \$50 (according to the *New York Clipper*). The Gasmann BBC represented Talbot Hall, a boys school at Nebraska City run by Reverend J.G. Gasmann.³⁷

A third game with the Pottawattamie BBC on October 31 at Bartlet, Iowa, a neutral site between Nebraska City and Council Bluffs, was not played. The Otoe BBC also learned “from good authority” that the team responsible for their only loss in Council Bluffs included players from other clubs around Omaha and Council Bluffs. Thus, the Otoe BBC felt they stood “ahead of anything in the state” in 1868.³⁸

Baseball returned to Nebraska City in 1869, when the Otoe BBC and Gasmann BBC were joined by the Coyotte (Cayotte) BBC of Otoe University.* First and second nines of the city engaged in games through the early summer. Later in the season, the competition between the Otoe BBC and Pottawattamie BBC was rekindled, but the collegial atmosphere of the previous year gave way to disputes during the games.³⁹

The Pottawattamie BBC also resumed competition with the Omaha BBC, and the Olympic BBC was organized in Lincoln. Elsewhere in eastern Nebraska, the Platte Valley BBC from Fremont defeated the Elkhorn Valley BBC in West Point. The Banner BBC of St. Derooin defeated the Brownville BBC at the Nemaha County Fair and claimed the prize—a \$10 bat and ball. The Occidental BBC of Falls City (near the southeastern corner of Nebraska) lost games to the Pioneer BBC of White Cloud, Kansas.⁴⁰

With increasing intercity competition and unfounded claims by multiple clubs that they were the state champion, the Omaha BBC proposed a tournament during the State Fair in Nebraska City in early October. Their proposal was sent to the Otoe BBC, who agreed to present the idea to the fair board and make local arrangements. In the meantime, the Otoe BBC wanted to play the Omaha BBC, and the two teams met on September 29. The Otoes won easily, 65–24. The tournament at the State Fair began two days later. Although there had been an increase in the number of town teams, only four participated—the Otoe BBC, Omaha BBC, Occidental BBC, and a team from Tabor, Iowa. The Occidentals defeated Omaha in the morning contest, 44–36, and Tabor defeated the Otoes in the afternoon, 46–24. The following day, the Occidental BBC defeated Tabor for first place. Despite their claims of being the top club in Nebraska, the Otoes and Omahas were “badly worsted” at the tournament.⁴¹

Although they had not fared well at the tournament, the clubs from Nebraska City and Omaha still sought notoriety on the baseball field. Their next plan was to play the first professional baseball team in the country, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, who were touring California and defeating all opponents. When confirmation came on October 6 that the Red Stockings would stop on their return trip east for games in Nebraska a few days later, the Otoe BBC quickly organized committees on ways and means, grounds, and reception. Although the Otoes usually played at the fairgrounds, this special match was moved to new grounds “lying in Belmont, on the road to Morton’s. They are on top of the hill just a short distance northwest of Abney’s old shop.” It was about 1¼ miles from the Seymour

* In 1859, Otoe University was the first educational institution founded in Nebraska City by the Presbyterians. In 1867, Talbot Hall, named in honor of Episcopal Bishop Joseph Talbot, was established west of Nebraska City and became the Nebraska College and Divinity School in 1868. Nebraska College purchased the Otoe University property in 1872 and moved into the city. The school closed in 1885 (Jim McKee, *Lincoln Journal Star*, 24 March 2019, p L2).

House, where the Red Stockings were taken for dinner before the game. Not being a fully developed ballpark, “All persons desiring seats ... can obtain them by calling at the store of Whittredge & Evans, and donating one dollar therefor.”* The cost of having the Red Stockings play in Nebraska City was not reported, and the number of spectators was simply reported as “a large concourse of gentlemen and ladies.”⁴²

The game lasted only five innings. Not surprisingly, the Red Stockings easily defeated the Otoes, 56–3. The local *Daily Nebraska Press* ran an unusually detailed account of the game, supplemented by a history of the Cincinnati Red Stockings and their games through late September. It filled nearly half a page. A sample of the detail provided for each inning is shown for the second inning. Two days later, the newspaper published a box score, a brief “sketch” of each club member who had played the Red Stockings, a summary of the numbers of outs and runs for each club member in all of their games, and a summary of the Otoe’s games from September 1868 through October 1869. The Otoe BBC might have been beaten handily, but they had played the best team in the country. The Omaha BBC was the only other club in Nebraska that could make that claim, and they fared even worse. About 2,000 people watched Cincinnati score a 65–1 victory over Omaha.⁴³

2ND INNING.
Otoes.
Jones—Out 2nd base.
White—Score.
Whittredge—Score.
Beannet—Score.
Evans—Out on a fly.
Hale—Left on 2nd base.
Miller—Out 1st base.
Red Stockings.
Waterman—Score.
Allison—Out 1st base.
H. Wright—Score.
Leonard—Score.
Sweasy—Score.
McVey—Out 1st base.
Geo. Wright—Out 1st base.

Baseball in 1869 slowed after the State Fair and the visit by the Cincinnati Red Stockings. “Base Ball is on the wane. Like other summer peculiarities it won’t stand frost, and the weather for the past few days has cooled the ardor of the Base Ballists in this section.” In Nebraska City, a few more games were played purely for fun into November by teams representing local lawyers, doctors, printers, cigar makers, and painters.⁴⁴ Yet, the increased number of clubs, the first state tournament, and a visit from the nation’s first professional baseball team had firmly established intercity baseball in Nebraska.

Colorado Base Ball Clubs

As in Kansas and Nebraska, the organization of ball clubs in Colorado resumed in 1866 after a four-year hiatus. The Colorado BBC in Denver was “composed of the very best young men of our city,” and they were serious about learning the game. At a team practice on April 27, “All members are requested to be present, as there will be a number of the members of the Excelsior Club of Brooklyn, New York, present.” However, preparations moved slowly. It was not until the beginning of June that, “The boys of the Colorado Base Ball Club [were] rejoicing over the reception of a set of regulation balls from New York. They propose to try them to-morrow evening upon their grounds.”⁴⁵

On June 16, the *Rocky Mountain News* carried a challenge from the club to “any other nine players in the Territory at a game of base ball.” The challenge was accepted a week later by

* M.H. Whittredge and Jonathan F.C. Evans, who owned a shoe store, were Otoe BBC members.

an unnamed team. “Awnings and seats have been arranged for ladies and gentlemen who desire to witness the match, and a large crowd may be expected on the ground.” Ice water was provided under tents set up for spectators and players. The Colorado BBC defeated a team said to represent the territory, 27–22. The *Rocky Mountain News* published a description and assessment of the game, along with a box score. Baseball had returned to Colorado, and supporters meant for it to stay. To underscore this goal, an engraved silver ball the same size as a baseball was ordered as a traveling trophy for the top team.⁴⁶

We have been shown a beautiful silver ball by M. Anker, Esq., to the Champion Base Ball Club of Colorado. The top of the ball bears the inscription, “Presented to the [C]hampion Base Ball Club, Colorado by M. Anker, July, 1866.” On two sides are engraved the words, “Champion Base Ball of Colorado.” Two bats crossing each other ornament the remaining sides. This ball is to be in possession of the best player in the club until somebody else proves his superior when the winner becomes its custodian.⁴⁷

Competition for the silver ball did not begin until 1867. The Colorado BBC started practicing in April, and they were soon joined by the Rocky Mountain BBC in Denver, who practiced “on L street between Arapahoe and Curtis.” The first game for the silver ball was set for June 1. Ten days before that, “The two first nines of the rival base ball clubs played a friendly game of three innings.” The *Rocky Mountain News* expressed a desire for public support of the championship game. “We hope to see many mountain folks in attendance. This national game should be inaugurated in Colorado with becoming honors—that means a large attendance.” In the first game, “the advantage [was] on the side of the youngsters—the Rocky Mountain Club,” who won 44–27. The *Rocky Mountain News* provided a box score and thorough summary, which was generally positive, but chided the players for their poor fielding skills. The two clubs played a second game 10 days later, again won by the Rocky Mountain BBC, 79–43. The *Rocky Mountain News* remained critical of the fielding. “[T]his game is certainly a disgrace. A score of seventy-nine to forty-three, shows playing which is not to be praised.” Nevertheless, the Rocky Mountain BBC could claim the silver ball and would have to defend it against all challengers.⁴⁸

The challenges were not long in coming. In fact, it was only a week later. “The Occidental Base Ball Club, hereby challenge the Rocky Mountain Base Ball Club, to play a match game for the championship of Colorado and the silver ball.” Some of the members of the Colorado BBC had quickly organized the Occidental BBC, picking up a few new players. The challenge was accepted, but no game was reported. By August, the Occidental BBC included former members of both the Colorado BBC and the Rocky Mountain BBC. Unfortunately, this left no club for them to compete against, so they played the Field Nine and the Unknowns, which included some of their own members. An open challenge was issued for October, but the “Base Ball match yesterday at the fair grounds did not amount to much[;] no one appeared against the ‘Occidentals,’ so they played a few innings among themselves.” There were two second-tier clubs—Arapahoe and Seminary—who played each other, but none of the games lasted nine innings. The Occidental BBC accepted a

challenge from the Omaha BBC, but the challengers did not make the trip west. Based on this one unplayed game, "The Occidentals, therefore, claim the championship of the west, including Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and western Missouri."⁴⁹

The difficulty in finding opponents continued in 1868, when the *Rocky Mountain News* carried only one game report. In June, the Occidental BBC defeated the Active BBC by an embarrassingly lopsided score (nearly 50 runs). Thus, the Occidentals were "still the champion club."⁵⁰ The Active BBC reorganized in 1869 and changed their name to the White Stocking BBC in August. It was at this time that they challenged the Occidental BBC to a home-and-home series "for the silver ball and the championship of Colorado." Two months later, the Unknown BBC challenged the White Stocking BBC, while the White Stockings challenged "any club or picked nine in the territory" to a game on October 30 on their grounds "at the National Park" in Denver. Yet, no games were reported as a result of any of these challenges. The final baseball notice of the year was an invitation "to all base ball players to meet on the grounds of the White Stocking base ball club ... on Thursday, November 18, '69, to celebrate the ending day of the season."⁵¹

The White Stocking BBC reorganized in early June 1870. The Occidental BBC was also intact, although little was published about them. The Eclipse BBC of Cheyenne, Wyoming sought games with both Denver clubs. The White Stockings had already accepted a challenge from the Star BBC of Central City for July 4, the date requested by the Eclipses. The Occidentals replied that they would be willing to entertain the Eclipses in Denver on July 25, with both teams putting up their silver ball plus \$250 a side. In the end, no games were played between the clubs from Denver and Cheyenne in 1870.⁵²

In addition to practicing every afternoon, the White Stockings warmed up for their game with the Central City Stars by playing a picked nine. The picked nine was allowed five outs per inning, but the White Stockings still won, 20–9. Despite their preparations, the White Stockings were soundly defeated by the Stars on Independence Day, 52–27. John Chase of the Occidentals was the umpire. After the game, the White Stocking BBC treated the Stars to lunch at the American House and then escorted them to the racetrack. According to the *Rocky Mountain News*, the Stars, "with a little more training," could give the Occidental BBC a "lively turn." However, the Occidentals declined a challenge from the Stars in August, because the Stars wanted to play during fair week in September. Upon learning this, the White Stockings challenged the Stars to a game during the fair. The White Stockings had reorganized and were "determined to win back their lost honors." The Occidentals also received a challenge for a game outside fair week from the Prairie Dog BBC of River Bend (about 80 miles southeast of Denver). If the White Stockings or the Occidentals played these games, there were no reports of them in the *Rocky Mountain News*. The Stars and Prairie Dogs found other opponents.⁵³

After the recent, erratic schedule of games, the first baseball tournament in Colorado to determine the territorial champion was set for September 1871. The McCook BBC represented Denver early in the season, but the Blue Stocking BBC was organized in July to represent the city in the tournament. The purse was to be \$200 and a silver ball. As in Kansas and Nebraska, several clubs had been organized that year, but few agreed to

participate—the Blue Stockings, the Central City Stars, Greeley, and Kit Carson. The Kit Carson club did not show up, and a picked nine from Denver defeated Greeley. In the second game, the Blue Stockings defeated the Stars to claim first place. Mr. Tammany of New York served as umpire. The Stars requested a rematch for \$200 a side, which they also lost. Neither game was close.⁵⁴ The 1866 silver ball was not mentioned during the tournament, and what happened to it or the 1871 silver ball is unknown. Yet Kansas (1867), Nebraska (1869), and Colorado (1871) had held their first tournaments to determine their respective champions. Baseball had put down roots.

Legacies

Towns across Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska had embraced baseball, but the town teams that were once so numerous in all three states have largely disappeared. A few are still active in Nebraska, but in Kansas and Colorado, collegiate summer league teams have taken the place of town teams in several cities. Their rosters are filled with players who still have amateur college eligibility and want to extend their seasons beyond what is possible through their schools.⁵⁵

Professional baseball teams participating in leagues at various levels soon came to the region. Beginning in 1879 and continuing through today, several minor leagues periodically included teams in all three states with varying degrees of success. Many early leagues failed to complete their seasons. Some of these minor league teams have been affiliated with major league clubs, while others have been members of independent leagues.⁵⁶ In 1993, Denver was granted a franchise in Major League Baseball—the Colorado Rockies of the National League. Neither Kansas nor Nebraska has had a major league team (Missouri lays geographical claim to the Kansas City Athletics and Kansas City Royals).

One important aspect of early baseball that confronted the sport and the nation was integration. Segregation in baseball was the rule through the Second World War, but the situations varied. In some towns, white teams refused to play teams with black players. In other communities, white teams played black teams, but not as part of a league. In a few instances, teams of black players competed in leagues with white teams, primarily those in small communities. In addition, small towns occasionally fielded integrated teams. Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska were also among the last states to have integrated minor league clubs from 1885 to 1898 (Aspen, Denver, and Pueblo in Colorado; Atchison, Emporia, Topeka, and Troy in Kansas; and Beatrice, Lincoln/Kearney, and Plattsmouth in Nebraska). These stories have been described in detail elsewhere.⁵⁷ The exclusion of black players from organized baseball (major and minor leagues) through 1945 led to several attempts to establish leagues of black ball clubs, which finally succeeded when the Negro National League was founded in Kansas City, Missouri in 1920.⁵⁸

Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska have experienced all of baseball's growing pains—from the tentative beginnings of local clubs to the ubiquitous town teams to the collegiate summer league teams; from amateur clubs to semiprofessional teams to clubs in the minor and major leagues; from integration to segregation and back to integration, as well as other aspects of the sport's rich history.⁵⁹ And it all began when the territories were organized in the mid-nineteenth century.

Acknowledgements

I accessed newspapers at Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank.com, and the Illinois University Library (<https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/>). I accessed *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* through the Northern Illinois University Libraries (<https://dimenovels.lib.niu.edu/>). The Protoball website (<https://protoball.org/>) confirmed some of my information and provided excellent leads to some of the other early teams and games included in this narrative, which were all verified in the original sources. I thank the Kansas Historical Society and Lauren Gray for permission to use the photograph of the silver baseball trophy.

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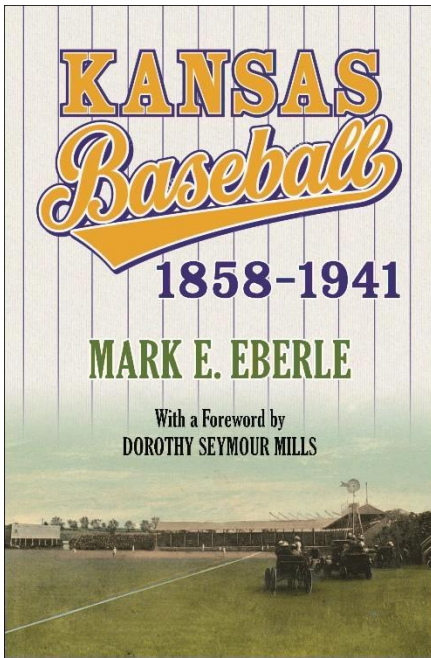
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- ⁵² *Daily Rocky Mountain News*, 8 June 1870, p 4; 10 June 1870, p 4; 27 June 1870, p 4; 28 June 1870, p 4; 3 July 1870, p 4; 4 July 1870, p 4.
- ⁵³ *Daily Rocky Mountain News*, 27 June 1870, p 4; 2 July 1870, p 4; 6 July 1870, p 4; 24 August 1870, p 4; 27 August 1870, p 4; 31 August 1870, p 4; 20 September 1870, p 4; 24 September 1870, p 4; 25 September 1870, p 4.
- ⁵⁴ *Daily Rocky Mountain News*, 27 July 1871, p 1; 29 July 1871, p 1; 17 August 1871, p 1; 5 September 1871, p 1; 6 September 1871, p 1; 8 September 1871, p 1. • Werner (2003).
- ⁵⁵ Eberle (2017, pages 165–179).
- ⁵⁶ Eberle (2017, pages 122–133). • Freeland (1964, pages 7–13).
- ⁵⁷ Eberle (2017, pages 64–95; 2018b; 2019a; 2019c; 2019d).
- ⁵⁸ Eberle (Eberle 2017, pages 76–82; 2019b).
- ⁵⁹ Eberle (2017). • Mills and Seymour (1990).



You can learn more about the early history of baseball played by teams throughout Kansas in the book *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*, published in 2017 by the University Press of Kansas and available in paperback or e-book through bookstores and online retailers.

The book explores the early game played by hundreds of town teams composed of white males, as well as teams of women, African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans. Also described are the regional minor leagues and major league tours, along with the histories of towns still playing baseball in the state's oldest ballparks constructed between 1924 and 1940.